

Frank Folsom, Head of R.C.A. During Early Rise of TV, Dead

Merchandise Expert Spurred Expansion of Industry— Held Papal Honor

Frank M. Folsom, former president of the Radio Corporation of America, an aggressive merchandiser whose bold selling concepts played a major part in the commercial expansion of television, died Monday night after a brief illness.

Mr. Folsom, who lived at 480 Park Avenue, was at the home of a daughter, Mrs. Edward L. Leslie, in Scarsdale. He was 75 years old.

During his presidency of R.C.A., from 1949 to 1957, gross income of the corporation rose from \$397.2-million to \$1.1-billion a year. The rise was attributed in large measure to Mr. Folsom's application of his merchandising skills to the sale of television sets.

In addition to his business interests—he was a director of several corporations—Mr. Folsom was one of the nation's leading Roman Catholic laymen and served as permanent representative of the Holy See to the International Atomic Energy Agency at Geneva. During World War II he served as chief of Navy procurement in Washington.

Descendant of Pioneer

Francis Marion Folsom was born May 14, 1894, in Sprague, Wash., the son of Edward Presley and Anna Maria Wilson Folsom. He was a direct descendant of Edward P. Folsom, who settled in Hingham, Mass., in 1638.

He attended schools in Washington and Oregon, but never received a diploma. At the age of 16 he got a job as an elevator operator in the Lipman Wolfe department store in Portland, and soon became a sales clerk. Three years later he was employed as an apprentice buyer at Hale Brothers in San Francisco. In 1917, when he was in the employ of Weinstock & Lubin in Sacramento, he joined the Aviation Section of the Army Signal Corps.

Mr. Folsom joined Montgomery Ward & Co. in 1932 as manager of Pacific Coast operations for mail order and retail stores. The next year he became vice president in charge of merchandising, and a director.

Catalogue Job Helpful

Mr. Folsom's chief duty in Chicago was to compile the company's massive mail-order catalogue. He and Donald M. Nelson, who designed the rival Sears, Roebuck & Co. catalogue, became close friends.

Mr. Nelson became chairman of the War Production Board after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, and called on Mr. Folsom to serve as his deputy for procurement. Later Mr. Folsom was put in charge of procurement for the Navy. He was awarded the Medal of Merit by President Harry S. Truman.

Mr. Folsom joined R.C.A. (which recently changed its name to RCA Corporation) in 1944, as vice president in charge of the Victor division and a company director. A former colleague recalled yesterday that "in the practical appraising way of the super-merchandiser, he looked around the Victor plant at Camden, N.J., for something he could sell."

Television Sets Pushed

The something Mr. Folsom fastened on was television. He believed success in selling the sets would carry along R.C.A.'s whole line.

Television was a new industry in the making. Sets were prohibitively expensive to manufacture; few persons could afford to buy them. There was only a handful of experimental TV stations in the country.

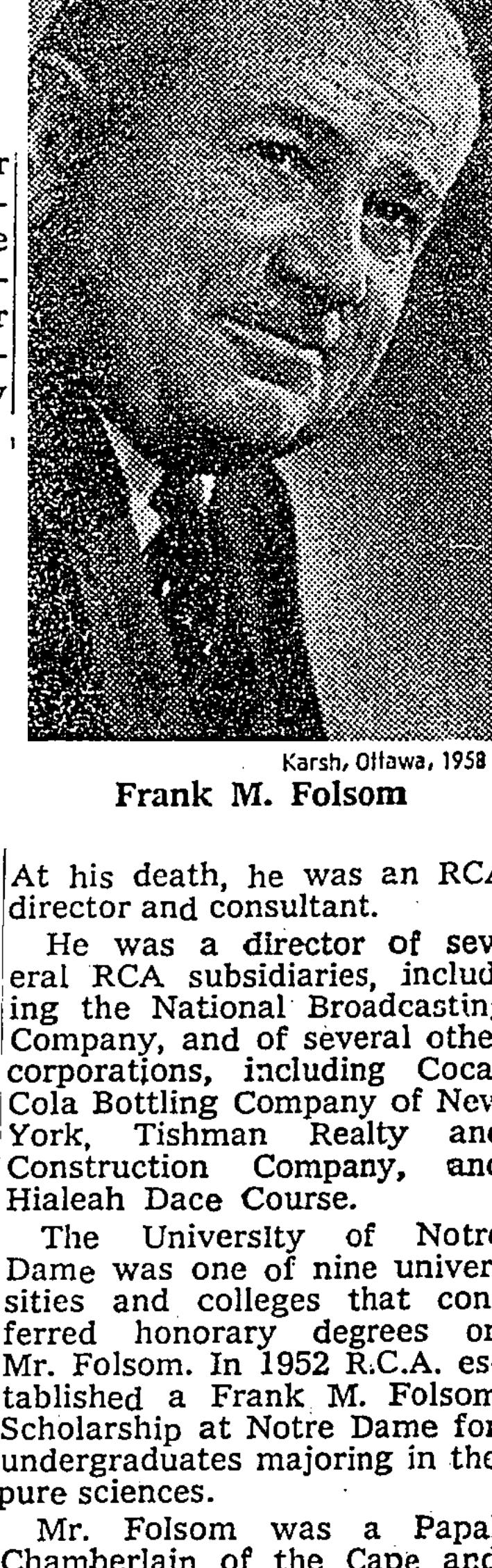
When the end of the war made resumption of public telecasting possible, Mr. Folsom invited 100 actual and potential competitors to a meeting in Philadelphia. He handed them blueprints for R.C.A.'s production and promotion plans for moderately priced TV sets and told them that R.C.A. was willing to gamble "several millions" of dollars on television's future. Some of the designs had been industry secrets, as were the production lines Mr. Folsom showed his guests in a tour of the plant at Camden.

Rallied Whole Industry

Mr. Folsom, described by friends as "a plain-speaking extrovert," told his guests that winning public acceptance of television was a job for an industry, not just a single company, and that he looked forward to strong competition to inspire aggressive selling at R.C.A.

R.C.A. gave Mr. Folsom, at the beginning, an operational budget of \$25-million a year for the promotion of television sales, but by 1948 the figure had more than doubled. Among merchandising innovations introduced by Mr. Folsom was the contract system of servicing television receivers.

Mr. Folsom became president of R.C.A. in 1949, on the recommendation of Brig. Gen. David Sarnoff, board chairman. He moved up to chairman of the board's executive committee in 1957, retiring in 1966.



Karsh, Ottawa, 1958
Frank M. Folsom

At his death, he was an RCA director and consultant.

He was a director of several RCA subsidiaries, including the National Broadcasting Company, and of several other corporations, including Coca-Cola Bottling Company of New York, Tishman Realty and Construction Company, and Hialeah Dace Course.

The University of Notre Dame was one of nine universities and colleges that conferred honorary degrees on Mr. Folsom. In 1952 R.C.A. established a Frank M. Folsom Scholarship at Notre Dame for undergraduates majoring in the pure sciences.

Mr. Folsom was a Papal Chamberlain of the Cape and Sword, a Knight of the Grand Cross, and a Knight of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta. He was a trustee of Catholic Charities of New York and of Catholic Relief Services, as well as a trustee of the National Jewish Hospital at Denver.

In March, 1968, Pope Paul VI appointed Mr. Folsom an honorary consultor of the State of Vatican City, the only American so honored.

Survivors, in addition to Mrs. Leslie, are 2 other daughters, Mrs. William H. Cook and Mrs. Robert M. Macrae; a sister, Mrs. A. J. Stupfel, 25 grandchildren and 11 great-grandchildren. Mr. Folsom's wife, the former Gladys Mabel Jordan, died in 1956.

A pontifical requiem mass will be celebrated at 10 A.M. Friday by Terence Cardinal Cooke at St. Patrick's Cathedral. Interment will be in Gate of Heaven Cemetery, Hawthorne, N. Y.

The New York Times

Published: January 14, 1970

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